DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 368 538 RC 019 616

AUTHOR Gibson, Ian W.
TITLE Preparing Teachers for Rural Education Settings in Australia: Issues of Policy, Practice and Quality.
PUB DATE Apr 94
NOTE 22p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association (New Orleans, LA, April 4-8, 1994).
PUB TYPE Speeches/Conference Papers (150) -- Reports - Research/Technical (143) -- Information Analyses (070)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Educational Needs; *Educational Policy; Elementary Secondary Education; Foreign Countries; Higher Education; *Preservice Teacher Education; *Rural Education; Rural Schools; Small Schools; *Teacher Attitudes; *Teacher Selection
IDENTIFIERS *Australia

ABSTRACT

This paper analyzes current policy and practice relating to the preparation and selection of teachers for rural areas of Australia, and contrasts these to perceptions of rural teachers concerning the adequacy of their preservice preparation. Nine recent Australian national and state reports and policy statements were analyzed. National policy recognizes the uniqueness of Australian rural schools, and the need for specialized training for future rural teachers in such areas as rural culture and society, Aboriginal culture, climate, mechanisms for adapting to local limited resources, and multigrade teaching methods. By contrast, the pervasive attitude in state education department documents appears to assume no need for specialized training or selection practices for rural and isolated personnel. Interviews with representatives of state and regional teacher recruitment offices revealed no standard approach to selection of rural teachers and little effort to match appropriate skills with rural placements. In-depth structured interviews were conducted with 24 teachers newly appointed to small communities in "outback" regions of Queensland. Most had requested rural placement. Half were in one-teacher schools, and 79 percent were teaching three or more grade levels. Three-quarters of interviewees were dissatisfied with their preparation for rural teaching, and indicated the need for better training in multigrade classroom strategies and teaching methods, organization, student evaluation and placement, school administration, and dealing with the community. (Contains 33 references.) (SV)

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Preparing teachers for rural education settings in Australia: Issues of policy, practice and quality.

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Ian W. Gibson
University of Southern Queensland

Abstract

This paper analyses current policy and practice relating to the preparation and selection of teachers for rural areas of Australia and contrasts these to the perceptions of rural teachers regarding the adequacy of their pre-service preparation. Based on research exploring the perceptions of teachers newly appointed to isolated rural schools in the western regions of Queensland, one of Australia's "outback" states, and an analysis of national and state policy contexts for teacher preparation, selection and employment for rural teaching, conclusions are drawn regarding both the need for specialised preparation programmes for rural teachers and the responsibility of education departments in the development of specific rural staffing policies and selection practices.

The methodology used for this project incorporates a document analysis of national, state and regional policies which focus on the provision of teachers for rural education, interviews with teacher recruitment personnel in state and regional departments of education and a series of in-depth, structured interviews with teachers from small rural schools.

Introduction

Following an hiatus of more than a decade when both government and public attention was rarely focused upon the educational needs of rural communities in a formal and structured way, a flurry of recent state and national level reports have attempted to redress this neglect. Despite this renewed policy level activity however, it would appear that a recent analysis of training, staffing and selection practices across the country would indicate that little of this policy level concern has been translated into effective practice. In addition, data gathered from teachers newly appointed to rural communities raise concerns about a lack of preparedness for work in these areas.

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Background

The international literature on the provision of educational services to rural areas has for decades stressed the importance of equity and social justice in consideration of policies and practice governing the adequate human and material resourcing of small rural and isolated schools from Alaska to New Zealand (NBEET, 1991; Devlin, 1988; Darnell, 1981; Sher, 1981; Turney, 1980). Additionally, the same literature has described the professional and social differences associated with work in these contexts and the need for specialised pre-service preparation, teacher induction and inservice training programmes to accommodate such differences. Despite this recognition, the international scene presents a barren picture of specific rural training programmes (Ramirez 1981), with very few colleges or universities specifically training teachers for rural service (Bell & Sigsworth, 1987; Sher, 1981; and Angus 1980).

Although the tendency of world populations is to become increasingly urbanised, there are still substantive rural populations being served by small, rural and isolated schools. For example, the combined rural population of the 24 OECD countries is larger than the combined population of the world's 25 largest metropolitan areas, and therefore, according to Sher (1981), such a presence of small schools suggests that neither their strengths, nor their needs should be considered marginal and that both national and local policies should be designed to attend to both.

Despite similar contexts, Australian teachers' attitudes towards teaching in the 'outback' have progressed a great deal since Richmond (1953) described such an activity as 'forced exile'. With detailed descriptions of unsuitable physical accommodations, drinking water and lavatories that were virtually non-existent, lower salaries, poor teaching materials, equipment and facilities, heavy workloads, frequently inept leadership, and want of supportive and specialised personnel, the Australian teacher of rural children shared much in common with international colleagues (Carliner, 1969; Muse, 1977). The picture of the young and inexperienced Australian teacher who "didn't want to be there", added to the legitimacy of the notion of rural teachers "being dragooned into teaching in isolated schools" (Turney, 1980).

Other writers of the same era praised teachers for exercising an "uplifting influence on small communities", suggesting that the capably handled small school is "characterised by a warm pupil-teacher relationship and a relaxed atmosphere",

where "children receive individual attention in their studies and can proceed at their own pace", and where the school itself becomes "the social centre for the whole district and an educational influence far beyond the mere curriculum"(Browne, 1927). These children "are given many opportunities to develop initiative and self-reliance since much of their time is spent working without assistance. There is usually a very active and close relationship between school and home." (Maclaine, 1973. P.75) Notwithstanding these claimed benefits of small rural schools, much difficulty was experienced in attracting experienced teachers to certain localities, and rural regions were characterised by a high turnover of young and inexperienced staff. Fitzgerald, (1976, P. 67) suggested that teachers for these communities came in "from outside with little understanding of the life style or of existing relationships", their training was generally city-based and their move to the country involved little choice. It was generally conceded that teachers came to rural schools as a means of promotion rather than for a desire to work in rural areas. The resulting negative perceptions of the rural child and community were symptomatic of attitudes seen to prevail at the prospect of rural teaching assignments (Turney, 1980. P.32).

Further, since the 1850's there has been increasing concern raised about the quality of educational opportunities afforded the outback child. Current awareness of social justice and equity considerations have added to these concerns. Many advances have been made during the last century to remedy obvious deficiencies. However, the completeness of the process of educating the outback child has been more recently criticised and the need for much greater attention to the problem has been realised (Turney, 1980). For instance, it has long been realised that "teachers in rural schools face special challenges and conditions not necessarily experienced by other teachers" (Commonwealth Schools Commission, 1987.). Notwithstanding this now common understanding, "few teacher preparation institutions offer programmes to prepare teachers for work in rural areas" (Queensland Board of Teacher Education, 1983). It is therefore, an obvious conclusion that "teachers accepting appointment in rural schools do so without adequate preparation for rural teaching" (Watson et al, 1986; Lake, 1986). The severity of the effect wrought on rural communities then becomes obvious, and the indictment of the bureaucracies involved more focussed when it is realised that the majority of "teachers (in most Australian states) can expect to be appointed to geographically isolated areas at some stage of their career" (Commonwealth Schools Commission, 1987. P.142).

Those special challenges and conditions experienced by teachers working in rural areas concern living conditions, relationships with communities, assigned professional tasks in small schools, the level of professional support provided, restricted access to one's own family, friends and other social needs and expanded educational services for the families of teachers. These significant challenges are magnified by the fact that teachers who accept positions in rural schools are inadequately prepared for the challenges they will face (Watson et al, 1986; Lake, 1986).

There is considerably more that teacher training institutions could do to encourage their students to consider teaching in rural areas, especially those students who show a predisposition towards an appointment to remote schools. Given that graduating teachers have shown a greater willingness to teach in areas with which they have some familiarity (Watson et al, 1986, P.21-26), an appropriate conclusion would be for teacher education students to study aspects of rural schooling and gain experience in living and teaching in these areas in order to increase the available pool of teachers likely to be successful in rural appointments.

Following this line of thought, a project was designed to describe the existing policies and practices of both government and employing authorities who are the major stakeholders in the enterprise of providing educational services to rural areas. By contrasting these findings to the needs of newly appointed rural teachers, a realistic and focused picture of the current situation in the Australian context was sought.

Research Methodology

The methodology used for this project incorporated a document analysis of recent national reports and policy statements on rural education, a series of telephone interviews with representatives of teacher recruitment offices in state or regional departments of education across Australia, and in-depth, structured interviews with the entire population of teachers newly appointed to small rural communities in the two western "outback" regions of Queensland during one school year.

Document Analysis

Nine recent national and state level reports focussing upon statements of policy or strategies for the provision of educational services to rural communities were

analysed for statements concerning the training, supply and selection of teachers with specialised skills for appointment to rural schools. These reports were generated between 1987 and 1992 by the Commonwealth Schools Commission, the National Board of Employment, Education and Training, the Victorian Ministry of Education and the Department of Agriculture and Rural Affairs, the Schools Council, UNESCO with assistance from the Northern Territory Department of Education and the Department of Employment Education and Training, the Queensland Department of Education, and the Queensland Council of Parents and Citizen's Associations, Incorporated.

Telephone interviews

In order to describe the extent of state or regional policy development aimed specifically at staff recruitment practices designed to support the selection of teachers with appropriate qualifications for appointment to rural schools, telephone interviews were conducted with either the executive director of the region or the employment or recruitment officer responsible for teacher selection in state department, ministry or regional offices of education, with the exception of the Australian Capital Territory, during May, 1993. In each case the interviewee was asked to provide all of the policy documents or information available which would impact upon the selection of teachers specifically for rural teaching, who exhibited the appropriate specialised training or experience to suit the demands of the job.

a) Department of Education Personnel

Telephone interviews with key departmental personnel responsible for the implementation of teaching staff selection practices from all state and territory level organisations in Australia (with the exception of the Australian Capital Territory) provided descriptions of current practices across the country. In some instances, relevant documentation was forwarded to the author to assist in those descriptions. Seven of the eight states or territories of Australia are represented in these data.

b) Newly Appointed Rural Teachers in Queensland

A series of in-depth, structured interviews was conducted with all twenty-four teachers who had been appointed, for the first time in their careers, to small rural schools during one academic year in the two most western regions of Queensland. Data gathered from these interviews were analysed and related to general research questions focussing upon the professional preparation needs of teachers newly appointed to rural schools. The categories of responses appearing in this

discussion were the result of a process of 'inductive categorisation'(Crowther, Cronk, King & Gibson, 1991) where repeated organisation and re-organisation of interview responses into logically related groupings produced the profiles outlined in the tables that follow.

Following the results of pilot interviews, the structured interview schedule was developed and formed the basis of two, hour-long interviews with each teacher. Demographic details regarding the teacher, and the teacher's school were gathered for purposes of comparison. Interviews were recorded on audio tape to allow repeated reference to the main source of data during the development of written summaries of the interviews. Through the creation of such an 'audit trail' for each concept analysed, credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability were guaranteed for the categories and conclusions that were generated. (Guba and Lincoln, 1983)

Review of National Policies on Rural Schooling

Australia's outback communities experience educational contexts and needs similar to those described in the international literature. In addition, special skills and knowledge are required to teach particular sectors of the Australian school population, such as Aboriginal children and children in isolated areas (NBEET, 1989). In direct contrast to the relative lack of government or departmental action aimed at remedying the neglect of rural needs in earlier eras, the present Commonwealth Government has renewed concern for education in rural areas and has attempted to address a variety of issues through a flurry of recent federally sponsored reports.[1] Each of these has raised substantial issues which focus upon the need to address the imbalance of services and opportunities provided to rural learners.

The Commonwealth has acknowledged a commitment "to provide to the people of rural and regional Australia, in a cost effective manner, the fullest possible range

1. Schooling in Rural Australia (1987), Difficult Educational Contexts (1988), A Fair Go: The Federal Government's Strategy for Rural Education and Training (1989), A Fair Chance for All: National and Institutional Planning for Equity in Higher Education (1989), Teacher Quality (1989), Delivery of Rural Education and Training (1989), Focus on Schools (1990), Toward a National Strategy for Rural Australians (1991), Policy Statement of the Queensland Council of Parents and Citizens' Associations Incorporated (1992).

of services as is provided in the major cities" (Statement on Rural and Regional Australia, p.4). Equally, the concepts of social justice and equity, which, in Australia, means that on a day to day basis "each person living in Australia has a fair chance and receives a fair share in the distribution of economic and social resources" (National Board of Employment, Education and Training, 1991; Queensland Department of Education, 1990), are promoted frequently and form a strong component of the Commonwealth government's current educational platform. Each report referenced, outlines the principle of equity in rural schooling as one based on a doctrine of fairness and impartiality which, inter alia, requires deliberations about the provision of well-qualified teachers who are specifically prepared for rural teaching, to be considered in terms of a fair allotment of the intellectual wealth available to all Australians.

Concomitantly, special consideration should be given to selecting teachers to cater for the needs of disadvantaged groups (QCPCA, 1992). In their policy on the staffing of isolated schools, the QCPCA suggest the need to overcome the difficulties experienced by isolated teachers through the provision of specialised training and professional benefits in addition to the initial selection of experienced teachers for these areas. The report, Focus on Schools, (Queensland Department of Education, 1990) recommends elaborate processes designed to formalise incentives to attract quality applicants to leadership positions in more remote areas and to guarantee equity in the process.

In the context of the Commonwealth Government's overall objective to increase rural Australians access to and participation in education and training, the report, Towards a National Education and Training Strategy for Rural Australians (NBEET, 1991), focuses upon a more equitable representation of non-metropolitan people in all sectors of post-compulsory education and training. The major conclusion of this fact finding body was that despite the considerable effort and expenditure of the commonwealth and state governments and rural communities themselves, the provision of post-compulsory education and training for non-metropolitan Australians remains "uneven and inadequate". People living in non-metropolitan locations are simply not participating in education and training to levels that are comparable to their metropolitan counterparts. It is widely accepted that lower participation rates in education and training are an indicator of disadvantage. According to this same report, one third of Australians are classified as non-metropolitan and therefore suffer "locational disadvantage" in relation to post compulsory opportunities. This should be a matter of great concern to all Australian

State governments, not only on social justice grounds but on economic grounds as well. Such discrimination against one third of the nation's labour force as a result of allowing this situation to continue without remedy remains questionable.

From an analysis of the submissions upon which this national report is based, the single most common factor leading to non-participation appeared to be a lack of access to the broad range of formal and informal educational options without major relocation and significant personal costs. Other variables mentioned referred to the perception of lower quality services in rural locations and inappropriate and uneven provision of services.

Further, in reviewing the research literature and government material made available to the writers of this report, recognition was made of the plethora of reports on rural education already existing and suggested that the central issues of rural participation in and access to education and training required a coordinated national response and the development of accountability measures. The relative absence of concerted and co-ordinated action to remedy these situations was recognised frequently in this report.

Various state governments have acknowledged the need for quality rural education to be supported and enhanced. In Queensland, for example, the report of the Remote Area Incentives Scheme suggested that "to improve the learning experiences of children in remote, difficult-to-staff schools of Queensland" a process of "attracting more experienced staff to remote locations and retaining these teachers in remote schools for longer periods" would be necessary. This report continued by suggesting that a professional development programme for rural and remote teachers should be developed and include a preparation component prior to remote service, support during remote service and, in special cases, support at the conclusion of service in remote schools. Further critiques of this situation make it clear that employers have not only a responsibility, but a necessity to provide these support services to rural and remote teachers and the communities they service to ensure educational and financial accountability and fair treatment in social justice terms. (Loney, 1993)

In the final conclusions and recommendations from a report funded by the Ministry of Education in Victoria concerning the Delivery of Rural Education and Training (1989), it was recognised that efforts must be made to attract and retain appropriately trained and competent people for work in rural areas, and later, that

steps must be taken to ensure that teacher training courses include subjects, units and practical experience that will equip and encourage teachers to seek rural appointments. The assumption behind these statements supporting pre-service training inclusions is that teacher recruitment and selection policies at state and regional levels incorporate the facility to select specific skills for specific locations and positions according to the dictates of such reports.

Other Commonwealth reports have considered the range of content appropriate for inclusion in pre-service training. Such teacher preparation programmes should include: rural culture and social conditions; Aboriginal culture and the multicultural nature of rural society; knowledge about the natural conditions of rural and especially remote areas, including climatic conditions; the nature of small town life; mechanisms for adapting to local resources and limited services; and multi-grade teaching approaches as well as the provision of teaching practice in rural and remote areas. Recommendations from the second UNESCO workshop on the training of primary education personnel working in difficult educational contexts suggest that teacher training institutions should incorporate courses of study which develop awareness of remote area teaching and include approaches to multi-grade teaching and community based education (UNESCO, 1988).

Despite this recent activity at a national level however, operational policy development at both state and regional education department levels lags far behind, and teacher training for rural situations in Australia remains at generally meagre levels.

State Level Policy and Practice in the Selection of Teachers for Rural Schools

Australia's six states and two territories are largely responsible for the organisation and maintenance of the systems of schooling within their boundaries. Each of these states or territories organises its schooling system through the function of centralised state departments of education or ministries of education. Variations occur from state to state with regard to the degree of decentralisation of decision making responsibility that has devolved to regional offices of education.

With the exception of only one state, which provided details of promotions criteria applicable to the appointment of principals to rural schools, each regional or central

organisation representative offered similar responses. In most cases, the response simply suggested that no policy existed for such 'specialised selection' practices as all staff were processed centrally. Other comments suggested that there was no policy in place, that the same process and the same set of expectations were used for all teachers, that no special arrangements existed for selecting teachers for rural postings or that no special policy or process was used but attempts were made to look for people with Aboriginal experience or qualifications for special Aboriginal placement.

Each state or region did, however, report providing space on application forms for the applicant to indicate any special qualifications or interests that could be considered during placement decisions. The categories offered as examples generally referred to early childhood, Languages Other Than English (LOTE), librarianship, sport and any disability the applicant had that might need to be considered during placement. A category referencing Aboriginal Education appeared to be the closest reference to rural education, but no organisation included reference to additional post initial training, specialised graduate study or experience of rural education. A common practice in all states and territories was that of requesting the applicant to indicate preferences for placement in particular districts.

From the apparent lack of specific policy and guidelines focusing upon the specialised recruitment of teachers for work in rural and isolated schools existing in State departments, and their regional counterparts across the country, it appears that there is no concerted effort on the part of the majority of states or regions of Australia to guarantee specific selection practices designed to match rural teaching experience and expertise to rural settings.

It should be made clear, however, that when interviewees were asked for a reaction to their lack of poiicy on this issue, several referred to the idea that, although no guarantees were made, it was common practice during the teacher selection process and specifically teacher interviews, to consider such specialised training in placement decisions. Other comments suggested that prospective teacher employees are selected on the overall balance of teaching skill and experience exhibited during the selection process and, although there was no guarantee that such information would necessarily result in specialised placement, it was important for applicants to 'put forward all of their skills and abilities' for analysis. One response indicated that it would be a 'good idea to recognise teachers with special training for rural teaching', but the region was 'not doing that yet'. It is the contention of this paper that no standard approach to the selection of teachers with appropriate training or experience

is in use in these states and that where attempts are made to match appropriate skills to rural placements, such efforts are random and little effort is expended in formalising the process.

Teacher Preparation Needs for Rural Schools

The discussion that follows is based upon the data collected from a sample of twenty four teachers who were newly appointed to small rural Queensland schools for the first time in their careers. Demographic details of this sample appear in Table 1.

Table 1 - Demographic details of teacher respondents

Trait	Variable	N
Prior Teaching Experience	Less than one year	**8**
	One to Two years	**8**
	Two to Five years	**8**
Time at Current School	Six months or less	**24**
Requested Rural Placement	Yes	**20**
	No	**4**
Teachers at School	One	**12**
	Two	**3**
	Three	**2**
	Four	**6**
	Five	**1**
Previous Outback Experience		
	Yes	**14**
	No	**10**

Prior to discussing the perceptions of these subjects concerning their level of preparation for these isolated situations, it is of interest to note their attitudes and first reactions to a rural appointment. If we are to believe the overriding orientation of the literature from earlier eras, the attitudes of such teachers "caught" in these isolated situations should be summarised by quoting Richmond's (1953) reference to "forced

exile". The subjects of this study, however, overwhelmingly contradict this earlier finding. Twenty of the twenty four subjects had requested a placement similar to the one they received. Upon being notified of their new post, twenty three of the twenty four reported a largely positive reaction to the appointment, while only three of these reported somewhat of a 'mixed' reaction. It could be said then, that subjects' perceptions of the adequacy of their preparation for these posts were not clouded by a latent hostility to their isolation or their placement, but stem from a realistic evaluation of both personal and professional preparedness for the rigours of the job.

In the process of analysing the strengths and deficiencies of their performance in small isolated rural schools, this sample of teachers has described a list of skills, strategies and teacher attributes missing from their pre-service preparation that carry clear connotations for teacher education institutions across the country. Questions, such as, "How would you rate your performance over the last three months?", "Describe your most disappointing moments during this period.", "What factors have influenced your success?" and "What strategies do you need to develop to cope with the expectations of your job?" led naturally, in the minds of these respondents, to discussions of their own perceived weaknesses and the likely causes of these weaknesses in their professional preparation.

Table 2 is comprised of a series of cross-referenced responses to questions relating to the adequacy of professional preparation, perceptions of success, the identification of personal and professional skills requiring development, and general evaluations of teacher preparedness for the situation. In organising teacher reactions to questions, similar, multiple comments from the same respondent have only been counted once. For example, organisation and planning difficulties have been experienced by a respondent and has become an overriding theme in the responses received from that subject throughout the interview. These similar responses have been grouped together under a general heading, such as 'Organisation / Planning'. This category, for example, contains such items as, "I didn't expect it to be so hard to organise things", "I am so disorganised!", "Organisation and planning are such a heavy burden", " I'm frustrated with planning, it's a bit like Mission Impossible!" "Planning, timetabling and group work need help, I need organisational assistance", " I feel as though I've overcome the organisational difficulties I started out with and things are going quite well in that area now." Frequency of response is not an issue in this study.

It becomes immediately noticeable that these teachers agree on several areas of skill or training deficiency. Sixty-seven percent feel a strong need for assistance in dealing with the strategies associated with multi-age groupings that are so prevalent in these small isolated schools. The urgency of this training need is increased when it is realised that all subjects have responsibility for at least two age groups, 79% of them have to cope with three or more age groups, and 46% take total responsibility for the educational growth of seven age groups.

A closely associated concern is that of curriculum organisation and planning. This category extends from matters dealing with classroom organisation and planning to school based curriculum organisation and planning. Sixty-three percent of the respondents expressed concern with their level of preparation in this area. In the minds of the subjects, a very fine line separates organisational and planning considerations from general administrative considerations; 46% of the sample referenced concern with their lack of familiarity with school administrative procedures, while 64% of those having administrative responsibilities outside of the normal classroom see themselves inadequately trained for the responsibilities assigned to them. In total, seventy-five percent of respondents perceive themselves as underskilled in areas concerning rural classroom organisation and small school administration.

Table 2 - Rural teachers' perceptions of deficiencies in their pre-service preparation programmes

Category	Percentage recognising category as a training deficiency
Poor preparation for rural teaching	75
Specific rural teaching strategies	75
Organisation / administration of small schools	75
Multi-grade techniques	67
Curriculum organisation / planning	63
Pupil assessment and placement	50
Role and responsibilities of principalship	46
Community strategies	46
Time management	42
Curriculum content	33
Curric. sequencing and scope for multi-grades	33
Lower grade experience	29
Perceptions of rural teaching role	17

Another area closely associated with the organisation and management of teaching responsibilities is that of "pupil assessment". This category refers to the need to be able to assess student ability and generate appropriate placements within the scope and sequence of curriculum most appropriate to their level of performance in what is frequently a complex, multi-age framework with few age mates available for peer group work. Twelve teachers (50%) expressed a concern with their lack of expertise in this area. Suggestions were made that some need to emphasise the importance of continuity and record maintenance during a staffing changeover might overcome this problem. A significant number of responses suggested the need for greater knowledge of both curriculum content (33%) and the scope and sequence of content (33%) appropriate to all age levels.

Other areas of skill or knowledge deficiency concerning this sample of teachers revolve around appropriate and effective techniques for the management of time in rural settings when little professional support is available on a day to day basis(41.6%), strategies for dealing with lower grade students in mixed age classes (29%), inadequate perception of job responsibility (16.6%) and extent and ability to locate and acquire resources (8.3%).

A major area requiring increased training effort was revealed when eleven teachers (45.8%) identified a concern with their lack of ability in exercising community interaction strategies that were successful and productive. When analysed further, the findings presented in Table 3 resulted. Seventy-one percent of these teachers recognised signs of supportive interest from some quarters in the community despite the fact that seventy-nine percent of the total sample reported some concern with having to deal with problems arising from community situations. For example, 54.2% of these teachers believed that strong community expectations required a moderating of their teaching performance. Generalised 'problems' were alluded to by 41.6% of the sample. Many of these problem areas include value clashes, liberal criticism for which the teacher is unprepared, a total lack of involvement of the community, socio-economic or sectarian divisiveness within the community, "living in a fish bowl", and being victims of the 'grapevine'. 'Value clashes' were experienced by 33% and 16.6% made some comment about the influence of a 'male dominated' society on their teaching.

Table 3 - Rural teachers' perceptions of deficiencies in their in-service and induction programmes

Category	Percentage recognising category as an in-service or induction programme deficiency
Awareness of existing community problems	79
Community involvement strategies	71
Awareness of community expectations	54
Value clashes	33
Male dominated orientation	17
Resource acquisition processes	8

Seventy one percent of this sample reported strong community involvement in school activities. In combination with the 45.8% of respondents, mentioned above who were having difficulty in related areas, these results suggest that further effort is required on the part of teacher training institutions, or departmental induction processes to create, within these teachers, an awareness of community dynamics which influence the teaching-learning environment. and to provide them with the skills necessary to make the most of these situations.

In addition to areas traditionally included in teacher preparation programmes, other areas of relevance to rural conditions were uncovered. For example, information about the expectations on the teacher by stakeholder groups may be of great importance to the preparation of teachers unfamiliar with small isolated communities and the role of the teacher in those communities. In describing their impressions of the expectations held for them by the Department, these teachers perceive that, as they have general primary teaching qualifications, the 'Department' expects them to be totally capable and in control of every primary school situation regardless of location or community composition. Yet one of three teachers themselves feel inadequate and in need of support (33%). They perceive the 'Department' demanding that administrative duties and requirements of small schools be mastered and met without prior instruction or assistance, even at the expense of teaching (21%). Twenty-one percent of the respondents feel they will be left totally alone as long as they fulfil their small school administrative duties (21%). It is encouraging to note however, that another 25% of these subjects are more than aware of the support and encouragement afforded them by the Department through competent inspectors, consultants and advisers who are readily available and willing to assist.

Perceived expectations held by their host communities are also of interest to these teachers. It is generally felt that these communities view 'good' teachers as those capable of communicating the basic skills (37.5%), with an authoritarian, strict approach (37.5%), and doing the job required without expecting the community to be involved (37.5%). Smaller percentages of these respondents feel that they are expected to become involved in community activities (29%), be organised (16.6%), do what the community expects (12.5%) and be a model or example for their children (8.3%).

What do these perceived expectations suggest then for teachers newly appointed to these situations? Seventy-one percent of them feel it is of utmost importance to be forewarned of a community's expectations, values and composition if their immediate success is to be encouraged. Additionally, they have developed and refined techniques, frequently through trial and error, that have proved successful in dealing with community influences. Fifty-eight percent of the respondents are convinced that making an effort to join in, to 'have a go', will alleviate many of the concerns effecting 'new' teachers in a community. Some suggest however, that listening, in a guarded diplomatic, non-judgmental way (33%) is a major rule of personal and professional survival. Others suggest that accepting the situation as it is and for what it is (33%), making an effort to communicate with the community by whatever means is acceptable (16.6%) and 'lying low' in order to assess the situation before embarking on any community involvement (16.6%) are acceptable means of dealing with these unsure situations.

These teachers have struggled to survive in new situations with varying results, but what areas of skill not related to professional or community considerations are seen to be important in terms of survival strategies for these teachers? What has allowed these professionals to perceive themselves as successful, to feel 'in control' and effective in rural teaching situations? Twenty-one of the twenty-four subjects (87.5%) in this study are dependent upon a strategy that revolves around interaction and communication; 70.8% of the entire sample rely on contacting professional colleagues, consultants, support groups or just sharing and talking with friends or acquaintances to cater to their needs for affiliation, contact or feedback; 45.8% of them cope with the strains of the situation by 'joining in' and interacting with those around them in community activities. Many of those who joined in do so by offering their skills and talents to the community (committee work, sports coaching, aerobics classes etc.) 41.6% of these teachers 'socialise' ("go to the pub", "play sport with

local teams", "go to properties and help mend fences") regularly on weekends in order to prepare them for the following week's activities, but do not engage in these activities during the week. A large number of these teachers feel the need to "leave town" on a regular basis on weekends(33%). All of those in this category feel the need for personal social gratification with age cohorts or previous acquaintances, despite the pressure to appear to be part of the local community, and despite the negative community connotations that could result by appearing to "leave town on the weekends"; 54.2% relied on their ability to maintain a positive attitude. This attitude was based on developing an understanding of the community, appearing interested, making an effort to belong, deciding to enjoy it and accepting the situation without judgement. Others overcame the strains of the situation by keeping busy (29%), by being prepared (25%), or by setting short term, achievable goals(12.5%).

The information contained in Tables 2 and 3 suggests that this sample of teachers perceive the need for teacher preparation programmes to include greater emphasis on the pedagogy of multi-grade classrooms and multi-age group strategies, skills associated with organisation, evaluation and placement, time management and an introduction to the administration of small schools and general administrative issues. Of equal importance is the need for greater community awareness, awareness of anticipated community expectations, the development of an ability to deal with values clashes, greater emphasis upon self knowledge and assessment and a recognition of the role of personal values and their effect on the teaching learning process. Further, these teachers emphasise the importance of analyses of the concepts of isolation, experience in rural communities and general rural familiarity as required topics in the preparation of teachers for rural areas. It is the poor treatment of these issues in teacher preparation programmes that led 75% of the subjects in this study to express dissatisfaction at the level of their preparation for these situations.

Conclusions

National reports and policy statements recognise the uniqueness of Australian rural schools, and the need for specialised training for teachers who will live and work in rural communities. By contrast, the teacher selection practices employed by states, territories and regions in Australia do not appear to differentiate between teachers who may have specialised experience or training for rural schools, and other teaching professionals.

Further, newly appointed rural teachers have indicated that their pre-service preparation was not adequate enough to allow them to deal effectively with the uniqueness of the rural situations in which they found themselves. They have suggested that preparation programmes should have stressed the technical aspects of the teacher's role in these communities in addition to including some level of personal values analysis with a study of techniques of dealing with the community and an understanding of the sociology of isolated rural communities. Their level of comfort and perceived success was also seen to be dependent upon an awareness of value differences and the development of strategies designed to cope with community situations. The responses themselves were of the sort that concentrated upon perceived deficiencies in performance arising from either a lack of understanding of a situation, a lack of familiarity with procedures, a lack of awareness of job expectations and complexity or a lack of knowledge of content or strategy relating to the teaching, learning process required in isolated situations.

There appears little doubt that teachers faced with the prospect of living and working in rural contexts perceive a strong need for professional training to improve their chances for successful practice in these unique and demanding educational situations. In describing these perceptions, teachers in rural contexts reinforce both the literature in the field and the plethora of Australian national and state level reports which emphasise the uniqueness of rural schooling and the need for the refinement and sensitising of teaching skills and attitudes designed to complement rural schooling practices.

Conclusions derived from this study raise the issue of government and departmental recognition of rural needs and the generation of specific policy guidelines, expectations and resultant practice related to the selection of teachers for rural areas. In addition, conclusions from this study indicate the need for specialised programmes of teacher education and induction for rural teachers and suggests that staffing practices and policy guidelines in departments of education must reflect national policies promoting the selection of teachers for rural schools who have undergone appropriate programmes to prepare them for such work.

Despite this increasing evidence, the pervasive attitude in Australian state education department operational policy documents appears to assume no need for specialised training or selection practices for rural, remote or isolated teaching personnel despite a clear recognition of that need by researchers and teachers. Such an attitude appears to be an artefact of previous, highly centralised systems of education and requires

concerted political action to guarantee that state and regional practice is brought into line with national policy statements on equity and social justice concerns for rural schooling.

Such political action should at a minimum include concerted and coordinated national agreement, at government level, to remedy the lack of attempts made to convert national reports to operational reality in the form of specific rural staffing policies and selection practices, to encourage the development of specific courses which focus upon rural education issues in both pre- and post-appointment courses of study or to ensure that teacher preparation courses include subjects, units and practical experience designed to equip teachers appropriately, and to establish widely accepted accountability measures designed to ensure equitable treatment of rural communities through the provision of appropriately trained rural teachers.

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